

Master and Slave Dialectic in Emily Dickinson's Poetry*

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Abstract

Emily Dickinson's poetry has been of great interest for academia for nearly a century, and many scholars have attempted to shed light onto Dickinson's poems which provide riddle-like definitions and/or narratives for many aspects of the human experience. One of the recurrent themes in Emily Dickinson's poetry is the individual's struggle to define his/her existence through a recognition from the other. Similarly, Hegel, in *Phenomenology of the Mind*, bases his standpoint on the self-consciousness' struggle to be recognized by the other. The encounter of the self-consciousness with another self-consciousness initiates the "Master and Slave Dialectic." This dialectic explores an individual's desire to be recognized by the other to become a self-conscious being. The desire to be recognized as such leads one being to assume mastery over the other, yet in time, there is an inversion between their roles as the master becomes dependent on his/her slave for recognition. In addition, Lacan, one of Alexandre Kojève's protégés, was influenced by the master and slave dialectic in terms of forming definitions of "desire" as a drive to be recognized by "the other," as in "Mirror Stage," in which the subject requires to be recognized by the mediation of the other to perceive itself as an independent being. This causes a split that forms the ego in the being, who experiences yet another split as he/she attempts to enunciate his/her desire to be recognized in the symbolic realm of language. A master and slave dialectic also exists in Dickinson's poetry, which mostly appears in the form of a relationship between male and female figures such as the moon and the sea, the sun and the moon, the mountain and the flower. This article will analyze the male and female figures paired in Dickinson's poems as "the other" to each other and their relationship will be explicated within the social construct they create based on their dialectical desire to be recognized. The subject's expression of desire in language will also be dealt with as a form of seeking recognition from the other. In such a context, and as a general rule, the female characters in Dickinson's poetry first appear to submit to a masterful male figure. However,

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in the final analysis, it becomes evident that this submission is a form of mastery, and that the female figures obtain recognition by mediation of the other in this dialectic.

Keywords: Emily Dickinson, Hegel, Lacan, Master and Slave Dialectic

Öz

Emily Dickinson'ın şiirleri neredeyse yüzyıldır akademik dünyanın ilgi kaynağı olmuş, pek çok araştırmacı Dickinson'ın insan yaşamının farklı yönlerine dair bilmeceyi tanımlar ve/veya anlatılar içeren şiirlerine açıklık getirmeye çalışmıştır. Emily Dickinson'ın şiirinde yinelenen temalardan biri bireyin kendi varoluşunu öteki tarafından tanınma/kabul görme suretiyle tanımlama çabasıdır. Benzer şekilde, Hegel *Phenomenology of the Mind* isimli eserinde görüşünü kendilik bilincini öteki tarafından tanınma/kabul görme çabası üzerine temellendirmektedir. İki kendilik bilincinin karşılaşması "Köle Efendi Diyalektiği"ni doğurur. Bu diyalektik bir bireyin öteki tarafından kendilik bilincine ulaşmış bir varlık olarak tanınma arzusunu ele alır. Tanınma arzusu, bir varlığın diğeri üzerinde efendilik kurmasına sebep olurken, zaman içinde roller değişir ve efendi, efendiliğini sürdürebilmek için köleye bağımlı hale gelir. Buna ek olarak, Hegel'in felsefesini yorumlayan Alexandre Kojève'in öğrencilerinden biri olan Lacan, "arzu"yu "öteki" tarafından tanınma/kabul görme dürtüsü olarak tanımlar ve öznenin kendini bağımsız bir varlık olarak algılayabilmek için ötekinin aracılığına ihtiyaç duyduğu "Ayna Evresi" teorisini oluştururken köle efendi diyalektiğinden yola çıkar. Ayna evresi varlıkta bir bölünmeye sebep olarak egonun oluşmasını sağlar. Aynı varlık tanınma/kabul görme arzusunu dilin sembolik düzleminde dile getirmeye kalkıştığında ise bir bölünme daha yaşanır. Dickinson'ın şiirlerinde yer alan ay ve deniz, güneş ve ay, dağ ve çiçek gibi erkek ve dişi öğeler arasında görülen ilişki köle efendi diyalektiği olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Bu makale, Dickinson'ın şiirlerinde her birinin diğeri göre "öteki" olarak konumlandığı kadın ve erkek çiftleri ve bu çiftler arasındaki ilişkiyi, tanınma/kabul görme diyalektik arzusu temelinde oluşturdukları sosyal yapı içinde inceleyecektir. Öznenin arzuyu dil düzleminde ifade etmesi de öteki tarafından tanınma/kabul görme arayışının bir biçimi olarak ele alınacaktır. Bu bağlamda, genellikle, Dickinson'ın şiirlerindeki kadın karakterler başlangıçta kendilerini efendi rolündeki erkeğe teslim etmiş görünür. Ancak son tahlilde, bu teslimiyetin bir çeşit efendilik olduğu ve bu süreçte kadın karakterlerin kendilik bilincini köle efendi diyalektiğindeki gibi öteki aracılığıyla elde ettiği ortaya çıkar.

Anahtar sözcükler: Emily Dickinson, Hegel, Lacan, Köle Efendi Diyalektiği.

Master, let me lead you.

—Dickinson to Higginson, L 517

Since its admission into the canon in the mid 20th century, Emily Dickinson's poetry has been the subject of a great amount of critical interest, both stylistically and thematically. Dickinson's unique style can be characterized as a dense compound of syntactic/rhythmic discontinuity and unconventional form (such as the exceptional use

of dashes, capitalization, ellipsis). The thematic aspects of Dickinson's poetry are also a source of uncertainty and/or multiplicity of meaning. This is partly caused by Dickinson's use of ambiguous wording, and partly by the lack of any substantial external evidence about Dickinson's intentions in employing such language. As Robert McClure Smith duly points out, "Dickinson left behind no formulated poetics" (1996, p. 1). Dickinson's poetry is open to multiple readings, and as Susan Howe, herself a poet and a devout Dickinson scholar, rightfully claims, "there can be no final interpretation" of her poems (1985, p. 133). Smith reads the thematic complexity in Dickinson's poetry as a façade of "seductions" as he calls it and greatly deals with the notion of mastery between genders (1996), and offers sadomasochistic interpretations of mastery in Dickinson's poetry (1998). Like Smith, Marianne Noble's article, "The Revenge of Cato's Daughter: Dickinson's Masochism," is another key study dealing with themes of sadomasochism and mastery in Dickinson's work (1998). Furthermore, Howe, who biographically traces Dickinson's artistic and literary development, calls the correspondence between Dickinson and Thomas W. Higginson "[a] game of hide-and-seek, the charade of domination, obedience, disobedience, and submission" (1985, p. 133). In light of these studies, but taking the Hegelian master and slave dialectic as its fundamental framework, this article will focus on a thematic complexity of mastery between genders in Dickinson's poetry as its main problem, that is, the equivocal nature of bonding and the shifting power positions in the relationships of the frequently employed couples in Dickinson's poetry, such as the mysterious master and the unidentified speaker, the sun and the moon, the moon and the sea.

The nature of bonding between the pairs in Dickinson's poems bears a close relevance, in terms of its dialectical development, to the process in Hegel's master and slave dialectic. This dialectic, as told in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, rests on the foundations of a human being's existential struggle to become self-conscious and his/her inherent desire to be recognized as such by another self-conscious being. This struggle initially requires one self-conscious being to assume mastery over the other, who in return becomes his/her slave. However, in time, the master becomes dependent on his/her slave to define his/her existence as the master, which inescapably reduces him/her to a slave role as the two beings trade places (Hegel, 2003, pp. 104-112). For Hegel, truth can only be attained by way of consciously experiencing it, but truth has many faces, or it appears differently to consciousness and forms different certainties (Houlgate, 2001, p. 291). Thus, Hegel is primarily interested in the development of the consciousness, and, as Houlgate asserts, Hegel's "analysis of the structure of consciousness shows how consciousness develops, through its own immanent dialectic, into higher forms of itself. He offers an account of consciousness that is both logical-structural and dynamic at the same time" (2001, p. 297). The development of the consciousness "into higher forms of itself" is, then, one of the fundamental aspects which hints how and why the *Phenomenology* employs the dialectic method. Correspondingly, in his reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, Alexandre Kojève places the concept of Self-Consciousness at the core. The master and slave dialectic serves as the central passage in formulating this Self-Consciousness as the "dialectic of desire for recognition" (Wilden, 1994, p. 193). Moreover, there is a subterranean cord between

Hegelian master and slave dialectic and Lacanian theory of subjectivity, for, Lacan, who was profoundly influenced by Hegel's dialectic through Kojève's interpretation, also focuses on the subject's desire for recognition as a necessary component of its perception of subjectivity¹. The emergence of the Lacanian subject "leads to an irreversible intertwining, within him, of desire, language, and the unconscious" (Dor, 1997, p. 181). The being, entering into the symbolic universe of language and the realm of the Other, becomes "a divided subject, and a part of his being is alienated in the unconscious that is a product of this very division," and "the only outlet for the subject's desire is for that desire to become speech addressed to the other" (Dor, 1997, p. 181). Lacan's formulation of desire requires a social interaction, and it can only be explained in terms of recognition from the other, the roots of which can be found in the Hegelian master and slave dialectic. In the final analysis, Hegel's emphasis is on the recognition of the subject, and Lacan's, on the alienation and splitting of the subject, allowing Hegelian recognition through the other. Yet, they both refer to desire as a fundamental element in understanding the subject's perception of itself. Hegel shows that even such a personal awareness is dependent on the mediation of the other and that no one can bestow a meaningful role for him/herself alone. Lacan carries this notion further, or employs it in a more specific methodology, to demonstrate how the being forms an ego and a subject, via the internal splits caused by alienation in the Imaginary and Symbolic realms (1977, pp. 1-19). Hegel and Lacan both create "others" for there to be a pure human experience, and this experience is built upon and fueled by a desire to be recognized by that other. Dickinson's poems that will be discussed here also create "others" for their speakers, namely apparently submissive female figures who seek recognition from their male masters who act out the role of "the other." While such quests for recognition repeat the inversions present in Hegel's master and slave dialectic, and further subvert them at one point, they also echo the Lacanian theory related to the manifestations of desire in language as a form of seeking recognition from the other.

Hegel's *Phenomenology*, in which the dialectic of the master and the slave is an example of an external confrontation, is "a repeated dialectic of the confrontation of self and other" (Wilden, 1994, p. 284). Hyppolite, the translator of Hegel into French, accordingly notes that "[s]elf-formation is not to develop harmoniously as if by organic growth, but rather to become opposed to oneself and to rediscover oneself through a splitting and a separation" (qtd. in Wilden, 1994, p. 285). The splitting subject of Lacan becomes alienated to itself both in the mirror stage and with the acquisition of language, and achieves recognition only through the mediation of other, and therefore, the Lacanian subject is "a split between two forms of otherness—the ego as other and the unconscious as the Other's discourse" (Fink, 1997, p. 46). The Lacanian subject is born out of and continues to exist in splits and in gaps. This is how, in Kojève's words, the subject can "rise above itself in order to come back to itself" (1980, p. 39), that is, how the subject

¹ Lacan's definition of desire seems to have stemmed from attending Kojève's lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* between the years 1933 and 1939 (Wilden, 1994, p. 192).

becomes a self-conscious being. Yet the split will remain, and the subject will continually require to be recognized by the other. Just as the subject is split, and just as Lacan noted that Hegel, with the master and slave dialectic, deduced that the human individual/subject is a “nothingness” (1977, p. 26), desire is “the revelation of an emptiness, the presence of the absence of a reality” (Kojève, 1980, p. 5). Since desire “is a perpetual effect of symbolic articulation” (Sheridan, 1977, p. viii), the utterance of the subject functions only to reveal this emptiness and its need to be recognized. Following suit, Dickinson’s “To fill a Gap” (numbered as 546²), first of the many poems centering upon the dialectic of recognition, seems to fit what Hegel, Kojève, and Lacan theorize regarding the relationship between the trio of subject, language, and desire for hundreds of pages into a mere few lines of poetry:

To fill a Gap
 Insert the Thing that caused it –
 Block it up
 With Other – and ’twill yawn the more –
 You cannot solder an Abyss
 With Air (Dickinson, 1960, p. 266)

“Word” according to Lacan is “a presence made of absence” (1977, p. 65) and in this poem of so few words, the focus is on three words: Gap, Abyss, Air, all of which signify an emptiness, an absence. In fact, since “Other” seems as the alternative for the Gap, or the cause of the Gap itself, but which is again absent (because it poses a presence only with its absence), there are four, not three, words that have the same effect. When we consider the “Gap” as “a presence of absence,” then Gap is the very “word” we use to define our object of demand. Thus, the Gap in this poem is desire formulated in speech. When desire is “forced to become speech in the mold of demand,” it becomes “a prisoner of the process of language” (Dor, 1997, p. 195). Lacan “views speech as a movement toward something, an attempt to fill the gaps without which speech could not be articulated. In other words, speech is as dependent upon the notion of lack as is the theory of desire” (Wilden, 1994, p. 164). Hence, the subject employs a language based on symbols, or absences, to articulate its demand as desire, which by the way has no chance of finding satisfaction because the object of its desire does not possess what the subject assumes it does. Thus, the poem claims that it is not possible to fill an emptiness with yet another emptiness, any attempt to do so will only grow that emptiness.

In addition, this poem presents the symbolic relationship of the human being to his/her representation as subject in language. When the subject finds itself and its desire represented in an Abyss of symbols, it becomes alienated in language, as Lacan clearly states “[t]he thing must be lost in order to be represented” (qtd. in Dor, 1997, p. 135).

² The numbers refer to the numbering in the Johnson edition.

As the being inadvertently creates an image in the mirror and while identifying with it becomes lost in this false image and forms its “image-inary” ego based on this “empty” image (Lacan, 1977, pp. 18-19), the being similarly creates and identifies with a symbolic subject, a symbolic gap in language called “I/me,” which is again an absence, for the being is not that empty word, the word is just a misrepresentation of the being as subject in language. In other words,

The relation of the subject to his own discourse is therefore based on a unique effect: the subject can be *made present* in it only if *he is absent from it in his essence*. This relation once again shows the structural division of the subject, and at the same time it reveals how the subject, having acquired language, immediately loses himself in that very language that caused him. *The subject is not the cause of language but it is caused by it.* [emphasis in original] (Dor, 1997, p. 136)

The above explanation makes it easier to follow why Lacan calls the subject “a slave of language” (1977, p. 148) and why “Lacan believes that language speaks the subject, that the speaker is subjected to language rather than master of it” (Sarup, 1992, p. 80). Then, does not the subject, who considers itself master but in fact is the slave of language, find recognition of itself in language? Is this not the very essence of recognition in the Hegelian master and slave dialectic? For the subject, recognition can only be mediated by the Other, and the Gap/Subject (better yet, the *barred Subject* as Lacan phrases it) of this poem clearly seeks recognition from the Other *as* language, and from the other *through* language. In other words, the subject can “perceive himself through his language only as a representation, a mask, that alienates him by concealing him from himself” (Dor, 1997, p. 136). The desire is to be recognized: If we “Block it up with the Other,” or in other words, if we do not attempt to satisfy our desire to be recognized by the mediation of the Other, our desire to be recognized will grow, because we, as the subject, cannot recognize our emptiness as emptiness alone for desire is “always constituted in a dialectical relationship with the perceived desires of other subjects” (Evans, 1996, p. 39). One’s desire is always the desire to be recognized by the other.

Poem 546 presents the self/subject as identified/alienated at the very moment of utterance, entering into the symbolic realm of language. The subject attempts to find a mirror and seeks a recognition in the abyss-like darkness of language. What it finds is nothing but the empty and the abstract echo of its own enunciation, which widens the gap between its being and the recognition it strives to obtain. On the other hand, unlike poem 546 which lacks a narrative and a tangible other, the following poems seek a recognition of the subject in a dialectical narrative from the other/mirror figures employed in their narrative. It will be revealed below these poems assign master and slave roles to male and female figures and these roles of otherness are constantly inverted and reversed, similar to the process in the Hegelian master and slave dialectic. The dialectic allows a recognition to emerge between these pairs in the poems.

First of these poems is poem 429, which describes the relationship between the moon and the sea as alternating ebb and flood of the tide. Instead of depicting the event as a natural phenomenon, however, the poem ascribes opposing roles of dominance and submission to the two entities and the relationship between them develops into a dialectic of recognition as the poem progresses:

The Moon is distant from the Sea –
And yet, with Amber Hands –
She leads Him – docile as a Boy –
Along appointed Sands –

He never misses a Degree –
Obedient to Her Eye
He comes just so far – toward the Town –
Just so far – goes away –

Oh, Signor, Thine, the Amber Hand –
And mine – the distant Sea –
Obedient to the least command
Thine eye impose on me – (Dickinson, 1960, p. 205)

In the poem, Dickinson uses words and phrases which directly and indirectly suggest a master/slave relation between the Moon and the Sea. The words “lead,” “impose,” “command” are associated with the master, whereas “docile,” “appointed,” “obedient,” are used with the slave. While the moon is personified as a female figure, and the sea as a male figure, the master in this poem is the female Moon, and the slave is the male Sea.

The first two stanzas establish the roles adopted by the two entities. The first stanza emphasizes that the moon leads the docile sea along the appointed paths despite being so distant from it, whereas the second stanza focuses on the willful obedience of the sea in its precise submissiveness. However, an unforeseen change occurs in the last stanza of the poem where there is a shift from third person narration to first person. Here, the identity of the speaker merges with the identity of the Sea. With this merge, there is also another significant shift, an inversion, between the sexual identities of the Moon and the Sea. The female Moon, which in the opening lines of the poem leads the Sea with Amber Hands, is now referred to as “Signor,” which is a title of respect for a man. As the speaker abruptly assumes the role of the Sea and dubs the Moon as male, the Sea in return becomes a female entity. Interestingly however, the roles of the Moon and the Sea remain the same: the Moon is still the master, and the Sea is still the obedient slave.

In the traditional patriarchal discourse, man is considered the oppressor, and woman is considered to be the oppressed, or in other words, man is the master and woman is the slave. However, Dickinson’s initial displacement of gender roles, along with her final deconstruction of her own displacement, posits that the seeming-slave is the one in control

and the seeming-master is the slave. This shows that appearances may be misleading, and that these appearances function as harnessing of desires according to inherent power politics. Robert McClure Smith, who reads some of Dickinson's poetry through the lens of masochism in "Dickinson and the Masochistic Aesthetic," defines masochism as "the search for recognition of the self by another who alone is powerful enough to bestow that recognition," (1998, p. 10) which is very similar to the essence of Hegel's account of the master and slave dialectic, and to the Lacanian concept of desire. Smith suggests that Dickinson

develops a subversive masochistic aesthetic that, by staging the thematics of domination and submission within a text, works against and undoes power hierarchies Typically, Dickinson establishes relations of dominance and submission in order to upset, even invert, the terms. (1998, p. 2, p. 10)

Although it may be a little far fetched to assert that this particular poem is centered on a masochistic narrative, the abrupt and unexpected gender reversal in the final stanza fits into the description Smith provides. The poem starts with assigning unusual roles to male and female figures in the beginning, only to invert these roles in the final stanza.

Poem 909 demonstrates a similar dialectic of recognition using the moon symbolism, along with the sun:

I make His Crescent fill or lack –
His Nature is at Full
Or Quarter – as I signify –
His Tides – do I control –

He holds superior in the Sky
Or gropes, at my Command
Behind inferior Clouds – or round
A Mist's slow Colonnade –

But since We hold a Mutual Disc –
And front a Mutual Day –
Which is the Despot, neither knows –
Nor Whose – the Tyranny – (Dickinson, 1960, p. 429)

Dickinson further complicates the master/slave relations in this poem by choosing to have two different masters by law of nature: sun, the ruler of day, and moon, the ruler of night. Both the sun and the moon seem dominant in the poem, but it is the sun from where all the light, and therefore the power, comes from in essence. The moon seems to be in a subordinate position to the sun, which is emphasized in the first stanza, especially with the word "signify," where the sun takes pride in its control of "the Nature" of the moon. Dickinson characterizes the moon as "lacking" when it does not shine; it is dark

and invisible, and therefore absent. Apparently, the sun is the cause for the moon to exist, and it even seems to control “His Tides” which appear to be the moon’s only possessions. However, the syntax of the final line of the first stanza questions its own assertion, as it may also be interpreted as a posed question “do I control [?]” for, in reality, the moon’s power over the seas is not related to its relationship to the sun, but to its close orbital position around the earth.

Where the first stanza’s speaker is undoubtedly the sun, the speaker of the second stanza remains ambiguous. It may be argued that it is the sun still talking of the moon’s qualities, yet it may just as well be the moon talking about the sun, which seems more likely: the first stanza is sun’s monologue on its superiority over the moon, the second is the moon’s over the sun. Again, there is a shift of power here as in poem 429 and as Martha Nell Smith observes, the “speaker subverts our expectations” with the lines “He holds superior in the Sky / Or gropes, at my Command” (1992, p. 117). It is not clear how “He” is both superior, and still “at [the] command” of the speaker of the second stanza. As the first stanza ends with questioning the mastery of the speaker, the second stanza continues to question the concept of mastery with these first lines.

However, if the speaker is still the sun in the second stanza, then he depends on the moon’s presence as an object over which he can preside because, to use Robert McClure Smith’s phrase, “the commander needs one who obeys to maintain his command,” which in turn ultimately engenders the ruler “as enslaved as the ruled” (1998, p. 10). This is exactly why the speaker of the third stanza (either the moon or the sun), recognizes a mutual dependence. This acknowledgment is very similar to the initial stage of the Hegelian dialectic of recognition in the master and slave dialectic. Master needs a slave to be called a master, but before that can happen, both entities need to recognize each other’s potential to recognize the other, which in turn makes the validity of their recognition dependent on each other’s recognition. The sun and the moon each holds a form, a disc, almost identical to each other, so theirs is a “mutual disc.” Each has to observe and recognize that they are the other before one can assume supremacy over the other. Lacan formulates this complicated relation as, “‘I’m a man’ . . . [means] no more than, ‘I’m like he whom I recognize to be a man, and so recognize myself as being such’” (1977, p. 23). Similarly, the two entities in the poem must recognize they are none other than the other.

Martha Nell Smith states that “like an American Hegel,” Dickinson, “concludes [this] poem to shatter an illusion . . . about dominance—that the one in control is all powerful” (1992, p. 117). This observation is worth attending to for it describes Dickinson’s inversion on dominance as a shattered illusion. The illusion shattered is like the very illusion created in the mirror stage, the discs recognize that they are the other but in fact they are not, and they claim a mastery over each other. It has already been mentioned that in the poem the sun and the moon are both masters: sun, the ruler of day, and moon, the ruler of night, and yet the final stanza states that they both “front a Mutual Day,” just as they hold a “Mutual Disc.” One way of explaining this is the word “day” can define the period from sunrise to sunset, yet it can also mean the 24 hour period. The sun and the moon dominate (the earth,

and the day) at the same time: The sun is always shining on one side, the moon is always shining on the other side, and thus, they complement and complete each other rather than compete with and/or rule over each other. So, the poem first establishes a master and slave relationship between the celestial entities, then inverts them as in the Hegelian dialectic, and finally subverts them: First the sun seems to command the moon, then the sun seems to need the moon to be the one in command, finally there is a mutual recognition that they are both in need of each other.

To be recognized is a fundamental desire, and as Kojève points out, it is this desire that is always directed towards another Desire, “another greedy emptiness,” or “another I” that can reflect back a meaningful recognition (1980, p. 40). We desire the desire of the other that can provide us that recognition. As Sarup succinctly summarizes, “the dialectic of recognition” refers to the idea that “we get knowledge of what we are from how others respond to us,” (1993, p. 14) and “we try to interpret our relation to others,” but “[t]here is always a gap, a misrecognition” (1993, p. 15). Moreover, Sarup asserts that Lacan suggests, “one can only see oneself as one thinks others see one,” which in return, “arouses an inherent tension, a feeling of threat,” because “one’s identity depends on recognition by the other” (1993, p. 16). Now, this dialectic of recognition is the very core of the Hegelian dialectic of the master and slave, yet this dialectic does not elaborate much about how recognition finds voice between the individuals. Lacan’s immense preoccupation with language, and his definitions of the subject through formulations of desire, which is expressed only in language, shed more light onto how such a recognition may come about. Lacan says,

What I seek in speech is the response of the other. What constitutes me as subject is my question. In order to be recognized by the other, I utter what was only in view of what will be. In order to find him, I call him by a name that he must assume or refuse in order to reply to me.

I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object.
(1977, p. 86)

The Lacanian subject’s desire for recognition reduces him to an object in language the same way the master reduces the slave to an object in order to attain recognition as a self-conscious being. The subject’s position in language is objectified in relation to the other. The subject’s desire to be recognized is echoed off of the other, whose desire functions as a symbolic mirror. Poem 738 exemplifies this Lacanian formulation, by rendering the speaker/subject present two sets of images/objects which oppose each other in terms of significance and which are to be used to identify the speaker as the response of the addressee. First set includes “the great,” “the stag,” “the rhino,” and “the queen,” while the second set of opposing images consists of “the small,” “the wren,” “the mouse,” and “the page.” The dialectic of recognition of the speaker with the addressee, and the power relations between the two sets of objects are worth observing as the speaker speaks of the desire to “suit” the addressee:

You said that I “was Great” – one Day –
Then “Great” it be – if that please Thee –
Or Small – or any size at all –
Nay –I’m the size suit Thee –

Tall – like the Stag – would that?
Or lower – like the Wren –
Or other heights of Other Ones
I’ve seen?

Tell which – it’s dull to guess –
And I must be Rhinoceros
Or Mouse –
At once – for Thee –

So say – if Queen it be –
Or Page – please Thee –
I’m that – or nought –
Or other thing – if other thing there be –
With just this Stipulus –
I suit Thee – (Dickinson, 1960, p. 362)

The poem first creates master/slave, female/male, dominance/submission relations within the sets as well as between the speaker and addressee, and then inverts/subverts the respective roles through the course of the poem. With the exception of the queen and the page pairing, the first set of images refers to the dominant/male/master: the “tall” stag (by definition is the male for deer), the rhino (with its phallic imagery), and also the great, because all have power over their counterparts in the other set. Conversely, the “low” wren, the fragile mouse, and the small are associated with feminine qualities of submission when compared with the first set. Although the images in the first and the second set are grouped in pairs to mirror each other an opposite in the first three stanzas, this rule is broken in the final stanza with the introduction of the queen and the page in a way that the reader’s expectation of the roles associated with the male and the female is inverted. Although the queen is by far the more powerful image as juxtaposed to the page, the queen again by definition is female, whereas the page is male. If the poem’s natural flow of ideas were to continue into the final stanza as well, then instead of a queen and a page pairing, there would have been a pairing between a king and a handmaid. In short, the speaker moves from the abstract, that is, from the great and the small, to its representations of power in nature, and finally ends with its social representation. By the time the speaker reaches the social representation, the power has shifted from the male to the female. There is a reversal of gender roles, a change of dominance and submission between genders, and the privileged becomes the unprivileged and vice versa.

Although the stag may only be tall and the wren low, if not great and small, the rhino and the mouse are most obviously one of the biggest and the smallest of the land mammals. The rhino is a large thick-skinned animal with its tough body plates and horned snout, whereas the mouse is a very delicate and weak creature. They represent the extreme ends of the spectrum of existence not only in size, but also in terms of behavior, power, visibility, and therefore of importance and significance. Not only is the speaker willing to become either choice of the other, the speaker pleads to be told what to become: "Tell which – it's dull to guess –" which indicates that the speaker's mere desire is to fulfill the desire of the other.

In the final stanza, the speaker, with the lines "So say – if Queen it be – / Or Page – please Thee –" suggests yet another role for him/herself, the role of a Queen or a Page, and asks which role in return would make the other happy. At the same time, the speaker seems to be pleading the other to define the speaker, for if the speaker is not defined, he/she is "nought." The speaker's "being" depends solely on this labeling/naming. Queen, like the rhino, is at one end of the spectrum and is a person of absolute supremacy. On the other hand, the Page, like the mouse, is at the lowest end of their power spectrum. The Page's purpose of existence is defined by his willing adherence to serve, to attend, to obey, or more precisely, to please.

There is an unconditional yielding on the part of the speaker until the last two lines of the poem. Here, however, the speaker puts forth an unexpected condition that must be met by the addressee. "With just this Stipulus / I suit Thee" means "the only condition I have is that I must suit you:" the speaker can be anything and everything as long as he/she suits the other. In other words, the other cannot bestow a role upon the speaker that can break off the "suit-able" relationship between the two; whatever the role, the speaker ensures that their relationship will prevail. Therefore, it is the speaker who tells the other what to do, so that the speaker can play the role defined by the other. Just as the power roles associated with the female and the male are inverted in the final stanza, the role the speaker assumes in relation to the other is also inverted. The speaker who wants to be commanded by the other throughout the poem, rings out by giving commands to the other, which retrospectively probes the reader to question the position the speaker has assumed from the start. Asking to be told what to become, the speaker has in fact been telling the addressee what to do all along, which is to define the speaker's role in the relationship. The dialectic of recognition in this poem ultimately reveals that the seeming slave is a master figure in disguise.

In the poem, the main desire of the speaker is to "suit" the other. Suit by definition means "to make appropriate, adapt or accommodate, as one thing to another." It can also mean "to be or prove satisfactory, agreeable, or acceptable to; satisfy or please." Remembering the many *suitors* Penelope had during the long absence of Odysseus, it is also possible to assert that suit means "the wooing or courting of a woman." By mentioning the size, the greatness and the smallness of the speaker in the first stanza, Dickinson calls the first meaning into play and suggests that the speaker will suit the other, the way a garment fits a person.

The third definition, however, is not easy to arrive at, for the speaker and the addressee are not directly sexually defined. The power relationships given between the sets and the reversal of gender roles both function as key indicators to reveal the genders of the speaker and the addressee. Despite the stipulation in the end, the tone of the speaker aims to suit and to please the addressee throughout the poem, only through its submission to the other. Therefore, like the images associated with female submission in the second set, the speaker also becomes a female figure. On the other hand, the fact that the speaker is the one trying to win the love, the consent of the other while presenting itself as a suitable partner, suggests that the female speaker is the suitor. Consequently, the feminine speaker of the final line, by all means, is challenging the gender roles of dominance and submission imposed by society and is putting forth the condition she will be the one doing the courting—but only to submit.

In lands I never saw – they say
Immortal Alps look down –
Whose Bonnets touch the firmament –
Whose Sandals touch the town –

Meek at whose everlasting feet
A Myriad Daisy play –
Which, Sir, are you and which am I
Upon an August day? (Dickinson, 1960, p. 58)

Another master/slave relationship between two entities is given in the above poem: One of them is the Alps, the other is the daisy. The Alps could be described as indomitable, overbearing, titanic, and unconquerable. Dickinson's depiction is similar to these: She dubs the Alps "immortal" and calls its feet "everlasting." She seems to be talking about a frozen Greek god sitting in stone when she describes its head covering to be touching the heavens and its never ending feet and sandals to be as big as a town.

The daisy, on the other hand, is charged with connotations such as beautiful, innocent, fragile, helpless, unknowing, untouched, or better yet, virginal. But the only adjective Dickinson uses to define the daisy is "meek." The word's definition is as follows: 1. enduring injury with patience and without resentment; 2. deficient in spirit and courage, submissive; 3. not violent and strong. McClure Smith notes that when "a female speaker's passivity, weakness, and insignificance" is emphasized in the poetry of Dickinson, that speaker is "locationally dwarfed by proximity to the powerful presence of the clearly superior masculine force" and that "the speaker's relative powerlessness invariably defines the relationship" (1996, p. 82). The superior masculine force here is the Alps and the daisy finds recognition through this juxtaposition with the Alps, for when only compared to the Alps the daisy can be seen as meek.

The last two lines provide profiles to the master and slave entities when the speaker asks “Which, Sir, are you and which am I [?]” The answer to this question may be obvious because of the use of “Sir,” already labeling the speaker as the slave figure, or simply because of the posed question itself. Nevertheless, the relationship is based entirely on the content of this question: One must assume the role of the Alps, and the other of the daisy’s. Just as Lacan says “In order to find him, I call him by a name that he must assume or refuse in order to reply to me,” the speaker of this poem is seeking a response from the other and a recognition from that response, for if the addressee assumes either of the roles, the speaker will surely find recognition in the other. Moreover, the question itself, that which constitutes the speaker as subject, removes any fixation of the roles to either character, which in turn suggests that these roles are interchangeable or reversible.

Another poem that presents the dialectic of recognition within a master/slave context is 603. However, the tone of this poem is a lot darker and colder, for the speaker of 603 is neither as articulate as the one in 738, nor as jolly or playful as the one in 124. The speaker of this poem speaks from the most intimate corner of its soul, and every fiber of the poem reflects the existential angst the speaker feels. In 603, we find a slave forgotten by its master in its solitary spiritual dungeon, whose phenomenological existence depends solely on the master:

He found my Being – set it up –
Adjusted it to place –
Then carved his name – upon it –
And bade it to the East

Be faithful – in his absence –
And he would come again –
With Equipage of Amber –
That time – to take it Home – (Dickinson, 1960, p. 296)

The first line suggests that there is a helpless “Being” without a purpose or an identity, which is later found by an Other, which “set[s the Being] up.” Although it seems that the Being at first is in a state of limbo before the Other comes, in actuality the Being starts to exist only after the Other finds it. But since it is the Being that refers to itself as being found by the Other, it is the Being’s choice of expressing its moment of existence. Therefore, it can be argued that the Being in question in this poem, prefers the mastery of the Other, and submission of itself to the Other. That is to say, without the presence of the Other, the Being does not exist. This notion is, of course, the very essence of Hegel’s master and slave dialectic:

Hegel argued that consciousness cannot grasp itself without recognition by others. The Master demands recognition from the Slave but this is a self-defeating process. He feels threatened because recognition of himself

depends exclusively on the Slave. . . . we would like to reduce others to an instrument – a mirror. (Sarup, 1993, p. 13)

But there is a difference here, for in Hegel's dialectic it is the Master who is threatened by his dependence on the Slave for his existential definition, whereas in this poem, the Being, who is in the position of the Slave, prefers slavery on its own accord and by its own definition. Therefore, it is the slave, not the master, that reduces the other to a mere mirror that becomes an instrument in the dialectic of recognition.

On the other hand, the Master Other also recognizes his position to the Being, and sets it up, adjusts it, and carves its name on it. The carving takes on the function of silent symbolic rape. With the carving, the Being detaches itself away from its self/body and states that the Other carved his name "upon it" instead of saying "upon me." This carving is an act signifying both love and possession. The first stanza ends with the bidding of the Being, by the master, "to the East."

The submissive tone continues with the opening of the second stanza where the Being advises, rather to itself, that it should "be faithful in his absence," and in the second line it assures itself that "he would come again." This is a clue for the reader that the master has a routine of showing up and disappearing again so as to enhance and strengthen their power relations. Being's willful submission to waiting for the master clearly demonstrates the anxiety it feels in the master's absence, for without him, the Being has little, perhaps no chance of survival/existence.

It is possible to claim that the master is the Sun, and the Being/slave is the Sunflower, and that the poem describes the heliotropism a sunflower exhibits during the course of the day as it follows the sun's westward movement in the sky. For, when the Master comes, he comes "with the Equipage of Amber," that he has a routine (day and night), that the master bids the Being "East." Dickinson employs the "Equipage of Amber" metaphor for Sun's rays of light. The fact that the Master bids its subject east, where the sun rises, serves as further evidence for the master's identity. The carving of the name mentioned in the poem also becomes clarified, for the name "sunflower" has Sun's name carved in it—literally. The carving in this case ultimately marks the alienation of the subject when introduced into the Symbolic realm of the Other as language. After the moment of carving, the Being states that the Other carved his name upon "it," instead of saying "me," and from that moment on in the poem, the being refers to itself as "it," and the poem does not return to the first person. The subject is split as it finds itself represented by symbols, it becomes objectified in language, and it constitutes itself as an object through the eyes of the other. Finally, and most importantly, the Being ultimately finds recognition from this dialectic with its master, the sun, for the Being is not just any being, or any flower, it is the sunflower, a product of this dialectic.

The speaker of the following short poem achieves recognition in a very similar manner to the Being of 603:

'Twas my one Glory –
Let it be
Remembered
I was owned of Thee – (Dickinson, 1960, p. 472)

Gary Lee Stonum calls this type of recognition “the surrender of selfhood,” and notes that in this poem, “Glory derives from being owned: recognized, possessed, and determined by the other” (1990, p. 158). Indeed, the speaker, who precisely assumes a slave position by being owned by the master figure, cherishes this form of the relationship and considers its slavery to be glorious. Yet, since Dickinson uses the word “victorious” synonymous with “triumphant” and “glorious” in other poems, this in return presupposes the following question, “if the slave is victorious, then who is defeated?” for clearly the opposites at play in this poem calls for this question to be asked. The structure of the last sentence sheds more light to the nature of this dialectic of recognition where we see a sentence in passive voice. The object of the lyrical self in the active sentence of “*You own me*” is inverted into a passive sentence as the privileged subject in “*I was owned by you,*” just as the roles assigned to the subject and object are inverted by the speaker. Consequently, this inversion rhetorically reduces the active participation of ownership on part of the master to a mere agent, and the master is syntactically forced to the receiving end of both the sentence and the action. Under such circumstances of deliberate brevity and reversal of activity/passivity, the apparently pleading request of the speaker, “Let it be Remembered,” stands out as nothing short of a direct order given to the addressee. Therefore, the master and slave relationship set forth in the first reading, like the one Stonum offers, is inverted by a second reading based on the accepted values the first reading offers, and thus, dialectically speaking, there is mutual dependence and recognition between the speaker and the addressee, which makes the master and slave *relationship* defunct, but the master and slave *dialectic* valid.

This notion that there is a dialectic, instead of a one-way master and slave relationship, between the pairs, is applicable wherever there is a dominant or a submissive figure in Dickinson's poetry. This article has tried to clarify that, as a general theme, Dickinson's poems make use of male and female figures in pairs, and juxtapose them in a way that these figures appear to have adopted master or slave roles. On the other hand, when the implied power politics between these pairs is observed in detail, it is detected that an underlying current runs between the pairs, which exposes the true nature of their relationship. This current presents itself as the dialectic of recognition, which inverts and subverts the roles initially assumed by the pairs: The master and slave switch places to assume opposing roles for meaningful and mutual recognition, because, in essence, both parties recognize the desire to be recognized by the other. The attainability of this recognition and the satisfaction of its desire is always based on the fluctuating relationship between the two interdependent figures mentioned in the poems, and being recognized almost always means to be the slave while playing the role of the master, or vice versa.

In conclusion, it is evident that, in Dickinson's poetry, the desire to be recognized makes the existence of the other for its satisfaction binding, and at the same time, the

presence of the other also creates a desire to be recognized. This apparently creates a cyclic, or rather dialectic, relationship between the subject and the other, which turns into a process, or in its essence, “a pursuit of wholeness” (Hagenbüchle, 1996, p. 9). In a sense, the assertion that “Dickinson knew that her pursuit of wholeness could find no rest” (Hagenbüchle, 1996, p. 9) remarkably echoes Lacan’s ultimate conclusion that “man cannot aim at being whole” (1977, p. 287). This is why the Dickinsonian persona is never content with any given role and resists any concrete identification designated upon him/her, recognizing that no dominant/submissive role can be assumed for too long. Dickinson, who, much like Hegel, is apparently interested in the development of the consciousness into higher forms of itself, advertently exploits the pendulum-like nature of mastery so that her lyric personas can never cease to strive for meaningful recognition.

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